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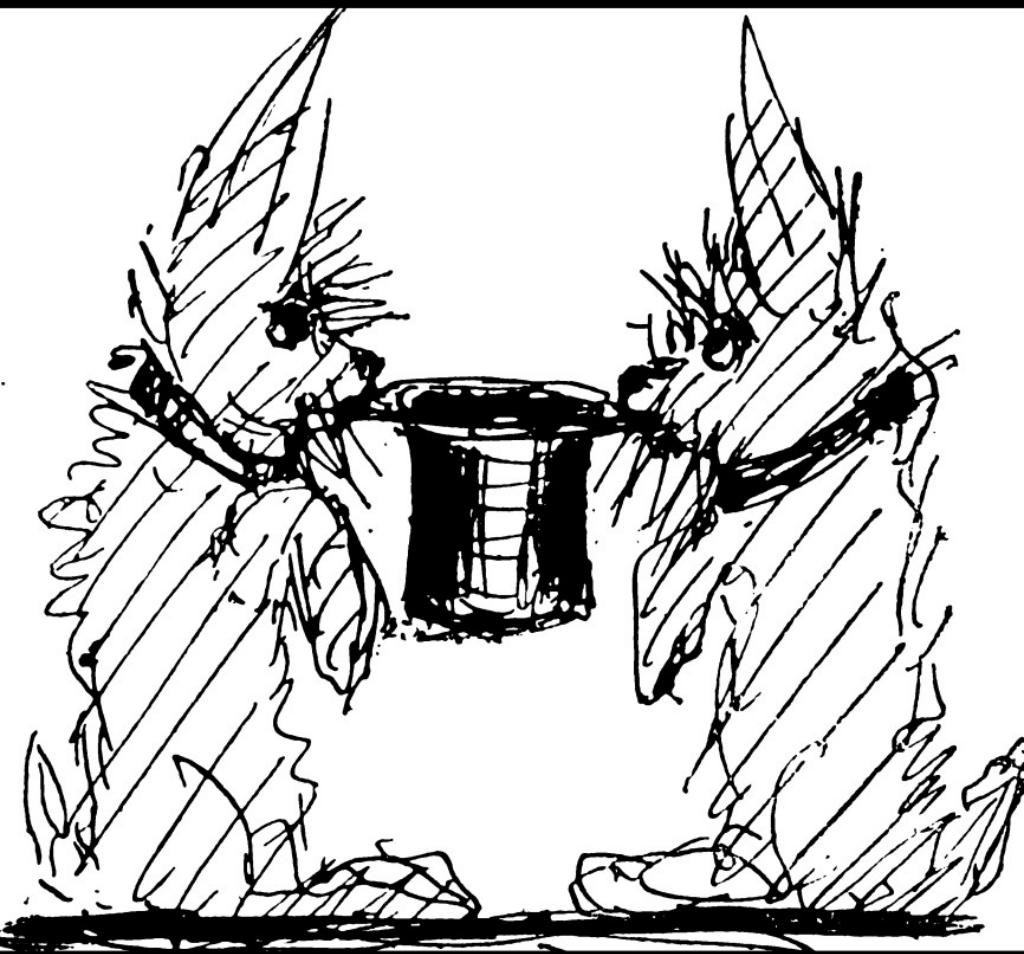
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*Something about a
well. With More of our dogs*

John Brown

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Something about a Well

WITH MORE OF OUR DOGS

BY THE LATE
JOHN BROWN, M.D.



EDINBURGH: DAVID DOUGLAS
1882.

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Something about a Well WITH MORE OF OUR DOGS

BY THE LATE

JOHN BROWN, M.D.

AUTHOR OF 'RAB AND HIS FRIENDS.'



EDINBURGH: DAVID DOUGLAS
1882

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
SOMETHING ABOUT A WELL,	5
MORE OF 'OUR DOGS,'	9
PETER,	12
DICK,	13
BOB,	14
PLEA FOR A DOG HOME,	19

SOMETHING ABOUT A WELL.

WHEN a boy I knew, and often still think, of a well far up among the wild hills—alone, without shelter of wall or tree, open to the sun and all the winds. There it lies, ever the same, self-contained, all-sufficient ; needing no outward help from stream or shower, but fed from its own unseen unfailing spring.

In summer, when all things are faint with the fierce heat, you may see it, lying in the dim waste, a daylight star, in the blaze of the sun, keeping fresh its circle of young grass and flowers.

The small birds know it well, and journey from far and near to dip in it their slender bills and pipe each his glad song.

The sheep-dog may be seen halting, in his haste to the uplands, to cool there his curling tongue.

In winter, of all waters it alone lives ; the keen ice that seals up and silences the brooks and shallows has no power here. Still it cherishes the same grass

and flowers with its secret heat, keeping them in perpetual beauty by its soft warm breath.

Nothing can be imagined more sweetly sudden and beautiful than our well seen from a distance, set with its crown of green, in the bosom of the universal snow. One might fancy that the Infant Spring lay nestled there out of grim Winter's way, waiting till he would be passed and gone.

Many a time, as a boy, have I stood by the side of this lonely well, 'held by its glittering eye,' and gazing into its black crystal depths, until I felt something like solemn fear, and thought it might be *as deep as the sea!* It was said nobody knew how deep it was, and that you might put your fishing-rod over head and not find the bottom.

But I found out the mystery. One supremely scorching summer day, when the sun was at his highest noon, I lay poring over this wonder, when behold, by the clear strong light, I saw far down, on a gentle swelling like a hill of pure white sand (it was sand), a delicate column, rising and falling and shifting in graceful measures, as if governed by a music of its own. With what awful glee did I find myself the sole witness of this spectacle! If I had caught a *Soul*, or seen *it* winking at me out of its window, I could have scarcely been more amazed and delighted.

What was it? May be *the Soul of the Well?* May

be *Truth*? found at last where we have been so often told to seek for it. How busy, how nimble, how *funny!* Now twisting, now un-twisting, now sinking on its bed as if fainting with ecstasy, then starting bolt upright and spinning round like a top; again it would curl up like a smooth pillow, and anon pause for a moment as if hovering with out-stretched wings, and then fold itself once more on its bed.

I have often seen it since, and it was always at its work, and is so doubtless still, morn, noon, and night incessantly, and its out-flow all the year round was the same.

Such is our well, at all times the same, full, clear, deep, composed; its only motion a gentle equable heaving, its only sound the liquid gurgle of its over-flowings among the roots of the flowers, its open face reflecting the heavens, calm or in storm, and though disquieted by every wandering wind, or dipping fly, or scampering 'well-washer,' soon recovering its placid face, while its depths rest for ever untroubled.

Pray you have a heart like this well, full, deep, clear, unchangeable, with Truth at the bottom; and a merry dancing elf there too, dancing to himself, 'ever wealthy with the treasure of his own exceeding pleasure.'

In the time of hot raging passion, a fountain of coolness. In shivering grief and bleak misery, a refuge from the storm, a covert from the tempest,

and at all times a ‘balm that tames all anguish, that steepes in rich reward all suffering, a saint that evil thoughts and aims taketh away.’ Fearless alike of fire and frost, cool, not cold, warm, not hot. How many such hearts are at this moment beating in the bosoms of our mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, as little known, it may be, as this wilderness well, as full of goodness and love that never fails, passing away in silence, and telling no tale of all the good they do, and known only by the verdure that conceals their course.

Long may thy springs,
Quietly as a sleeping infant’s breath,
Send up cool waters to the Traveller
With soft and easy pulse ; nor ever cease
Yon tiny cone of sand its soundless dance
Which at the bottom, like a fairy’s page,
As merry and no taller, dances still.

And long may our wells of living water find duty and affection, and making the wilderness and the solitary place to rejoice, their exceeding great reward, and elsewhere spring up into everlasting life.

12th April 1836.

1874.

J. B.

MORE OF 'OUR DOGS.'

THE printer's devil—a very small and black and gentle one, whose name is Snowdon, whom I like to tease before he is off by giving him a small coin and then taking it and seeing how he looks, ending with making him haul it out of my fingers with his teeth, a great joke to us two—was asleep in the lobby, and I was trying to be pleased with the last sheet of *Our Dogs*, when the door opens and in trots a hairy little fellow, with all the gaiety and assurance proper to puppies, responsible and not. He, at one bound, for he is as springy as *Jock*, was on the table, and staring at me and then at the proof, with his head on one side, as much as to say, 'Oh ! do put *me* in,—*Cur non?*' whisking off my spectacles with an ingenious jerk of his tail, which same tail I have no doubt he will soon be able to crack like a whip, so long, so plentiful, so handy it is already. Who could resist him ? Recovering my spectacles and my understanding, for if not identical they are

with me co-existent, I sketch him as he is now asleep at the fireside.

Knowing the pangs of bereavement and under the dread of that *ineluctabile fatum* which compels dogs and men, we have often spoken of appointing an assistant and successor to *Dick*; but we were ill to please, and we felt a delicacy as to him, for he is as compact of love and jealousy as was the Moor, or the elder *Peter* or *Fussy* or *Wasp*—to whose memory and to whose Mistresses and Master I dedicate *Our Dogs*. One day lately, however, a friend sent in a young Skye puppy for our judgment. We kept him for a day to study him, and the upshot is that we keep him still. He was so funny, so confidential, so plucky, his nose and the roof of his mouth were so black and comely, his genius for oddity, for unexpectedness so decided, his tail so glorious, that we could not let him go; and then, best of all, *Dick* tolerated him, adopted him, allowed him to take liberties with *his* tail that no mortal dog had ever before dared to do unbitten. Not that *Dick* played with him, or showed any approach to hilarity or acute interest, but he permitted himself and his dignity and his tail to be interfered with by this inveterate imp in a way that made the question of succession clear. You'll observe that I give him no name; this was our distress—no name would fit him. You know doubtless what one comes through in selecting a

name for a dog; it is infinitely worse than doing the same by a child; if it is your seventeenth, you can fall back upon Scripture, or the Anglo-Saxons, or the cardinal virtues; but with a dog there must be what Goethe calls an elective affinity between the dog and the name. Well, we tried him for a week in vain with all sorts of compact and cordial words, till one evening after dinner, when we were sleepy and the room darkening, this young and genial ruffian was seen perched in the arm-chair. ‘Peter!’ we all exclaimed, and *Peter* he is—not any particular Peter, but Peter absolute. I don’t know him well enough yet to speak definitely, but I incline to think well of him, he is an original, and stands on his own bottom. Dogs, like men, have generally some dominant quality; thus Toby was eminently wide-awake, though he was much else; Wylie, in the same way, was more *eident* than any one other thing; Wasp more impassioned; Jock more *daft*; Crab more deep—a very deep dog was Crab; John Pym more full o’ fechtin; Puck more of a simpleton; Rab more huge (in head, in heart, and in affliction); and Dick, like another Richard, more judicious; but Peter is, in his essence and in every action—especially of his tail—which he waves aloft like a feather or banner—*ludicrous*, he can’t help it, he does not mean it, he is it; he is like the great actor Liston, his mere look makes you laugh; not that you laugh at him, or in any way

think lightly of his understanding ; he is the cause, not the object of laughter, as many a good man and great has been before him ; he is not the least of a foolish or hare-brained dog,—he is a dog of affection and *nous*. He is a dark brindle, and as plucky and procacious as Mr. Roebuck, whom I am told he resembles, but then he is young. If I survive him, which I almost hope may not be, I shall perhaps write his life, which I promise will not be so long as his tail and shorter than his temper, which, with all his boyish wilfulness, I can see is as sweet and faithful as was Jonathan's (the grandson of Kish) or Colonel Newcome's. If he survive me, I am sure of one true mourner. *Macte esto puer!*

'Man is the god of the dog,' says Burns after Lord Bacon ; it were well for us if we served our Master as our dog serves his.

PETER.

Peter died young ; very quick and soon that bright thing came to confusion. He died of excess of life ; his vivacity slew him. Plucky and silent under punishment, or any pain from without, pain from within, in his own precious, brisk, enjoying body, was an insufferable offence, affront, and mystery—an astonishment not to be borne ; he despised to live under such conditions.

One day he came in howling with pain. There

was no injury, no visible cause, but he was wildly ill, and in his eyes the end of all things had come. He put so many questions to us at each pang—what is this?—what the — can it be?—did you ever? As each paroxysm doubled him up, he gave a sharp cry, more of rage and utter exasperation than of suffering; he got up to run away from it—why should he die? Why should he be shut up in darkness and obstruction at that hour of his opening morn—his sweet hour of prime? And so raging, and utterly put out, the honest, dear little fellow went off in an ecstasy of fury at death, at its absurdity in his case.

We never could explain his death; it was not poison or injury; he actually expired when careering round the green at full speed, as if to outrun his enemy, or shake him off. We have not yet got over his loss, and all the possibilities that lie buried in his grave, in the Park, beneath a young chestnut-tree where the ruddy-cheeked, fat, and cordial coachman,—who of old, in the grand old Reform days, used to drive his master, Mr. Speaker Abercromby, down to 'the House' with much stateliness and bouquet—and I dug it for him; that park in which Peter had often disported himself, fluttering the cocks and hens, and putting to flight the squadron of Glen-eagle's wedders.

DICK.

He too is dead; he who, never having been born,

we had hoped never would die ; not that he did—like Rab—‘exactly’ die ; he was slain. He was fourteen, and getting deaf and blind, and a big bully of a retriever fell on him one Sunday morning when the bells were ringing. Dick, who always fought at any odds, gave battle ; a Sabbatarian cab turned the corner, the big dog fled, and Dick was run over—there in his own street, as all his many friends were going to church. His back was broken, and he died on Monday night with us all about him ; dear for his own sake, dearer for another’s, whose name—*Sine Quâ Non*—is now more than ever true, now that she is gone.

I was greatly pleased when Dr. Cotting of Roxbury came in yesterday and introduced himself to me by asking, ‘Where is Dick?’ To think of our Dick being known in Massachusetts !

BOB.

If Peter was the incarnation of vivacity, Bob was that of energy. He should have been called Thalaba the Destroyer. He rejoiced in demolition—not from ill temper, but from the sheer delight of energizing.

When I first knew him he was at Blinkbonny toll. The tollman and his wife were old and the house lonely, and Bob was too terrific for any burglar. He was as tall and heavy as a foxhound, but in every

other respect a pure old-fashioned, wiry, short-haired Scotch terrier,—red as Rob Roy's beard,—having indeed other qualities of Rob's than his hair—choleric, unscrupulous, affectionate, stanch,—not in the least magnanimous, as ready to worry a little dog as a big one. Fighting was his 'chief end,' and he omitted no opportunity of accomplishing his end. Rab liked fighting for its own sake too, but scorned to fight anything under his own weight; indeed, was long-suffering to public meanness with quarrelsome lesser dogs. Bob had no such weakness.

After much difficulty and change of masters, I bought him, I am ashamed to say, for five pounds, and brought him home. He had been chained for months, was in high health and spirits, and the surplus power and activity of this great creature, as he dragged me and my son along the road, giving battle to every dog he met, was something appalling.

I very soon found I could not keep him. He worried the pet dogs all around, and got me into much trouble. So I gave him as night-watchman to a goldsmith in Princes Street. This work he did famously. I once, in passing at midnight, stopped at the shop and peered in at the little slip of glass, and by the gas-light I saw where he lay. I made a noise, and out came he with a roar and a bang as of a sledge-hammer. I then called his name, and in an instant all was still except a quick tapping within

that intimated the wagging of the tail. He is still there,—has settled down into a reputable, pacific citizen—a good deal owing, perhaps, to the disappearance in battle of sundry of his best teeth. As he lies in the sun before the shop door he looks somehow like the old Fighting Téméraire.

I never saw a dog of the same breed ; he is a sort of rough *cob* of a dog—a huge quantity of terrier in one skin ; for he has all the fun and briskness and failings and ways of a small dog, begging and hopping as only it does. Once his master took him to North Berwick. His first day he spent in careering about the sands and rocks and in the sea, for he is a noble swimmer. His next he devoted to worrying all the dogs of the town, beginning, for convenience, with the biggest.

This aroused the citizens, and their fury was brought to a focus on the third day by its being reported alternatively that he had torn a child's ear off, or torn and actually eaten it. Up rose the town as one man, and the women each as two, and, headed by Matthew Cathie, the one-eyed and excellent shoemaker, with a tall, raw divinity student, knock-kneed and six feet two, who was his lodger, and was of course called young Dominie Sampson. They bore down upon Bob and his master, who were walking calmly on the shore.

Bob was for making a stand, after the manner of

Coriolanus, and banishing by instant assault the 'common cry of curs ;' but his master saw sundry guns and pistols, not to speak of an old harpoon, and took to his heels, as the only way of getting Bob to take to his. *Aurifex*, with much *nous*, made for the police station, and, with the assistance of the constables and half a crown, got Thalaba locked up for the night, safe and sulky.

Next morning, Sunday, when Cathie and his huge student lay uneasily asleep, dreaming of vengeance, and the early dawn was beautiful upon the Bass, with its snowy cloud of sea-birds 'brooding on the charmed wave,' Bob was hurried up to the station, locked into a horse-box—him never shall that ancient Burgh forget or see.

I have a notion that dogs have humour, and are perceptive of a joke. In the North, a shepherd, having sold his sheep at a market, was asked by the buyer to lend him his dog to take them home. 'By a' manner o' means tak' Birkie, and when ye're dune wi' him just play so' (making a movement with his arm), 'and he'll be hame in a jiffy.' Birkie was so clever and useful and gay that the borrower coveted him ; and on getting to his farm shut him up, intending to keep him. Birkie escaped during the night, and took the entire hirsel (flock) back to his own master! Fancy him trotting across the moor with them, they as willing as he.



PITY THE SOR-
ROWS OF US
HOMELESS DOGS

PLEA FOR A DOG HOME.

EDINBURGH, December 8, 1862.

SIR,—I am rejoiced to find Mr. William Chambers has taken up this matter. There is no fear of failure if Glenormiston sets himself to organise a home for our destitute four-footed fellow-creatures, from whom we get so much of the best enjoyment, affection, and help. It need not be an expensive institution—if the value of the overplus of good eating that, from our silly over-indulgence, makes our town dogs short-lived, lazy, mangy, and on a rare and enlivening occasion *mad*, were represented by money, all the homeless, starving dogs of the city would be warmed and fed, and their dumb miseries turned into food and gladness. When we see our Peppers, and Dicks, and Muffs, and Nellys, and Dandies, and who knows how many other cordial little ruffians with the shortest and spiciest of names, on the rug, warm and cosey—pursuing in their dreams that imaginary cat—let us think of their wretched brethren or sisters without food, without shelter, without a master or a bone. It only needs a beginning, this new ragged school and home, where the religious element happily is absent, and Dr. Guthrie may go halves with me in paying for the keep of a rescued cur. There is no town where there are so many thorough-bred house-dogs. I could

produce from my own dog acquaintance no end of first-class Dandy Dinmonts and Skyes ; and there is no town where there is more family enjoyment from dogs—from Paterfamilias down to the baby whose fingers are poked with impunity into eyes as fierce and fell as Dirk Hatteraick's or Meg Merrilie's.

Many years ago, I got a proof of the unseen and therefore unhelped miseries of the homeless dog. I was walking down Duke Street, when I felt myself gently nipped in the leg—I turned, and there was a ragged little terrier crouching and abasing himself utterly, as if asking pardon for what he had done. He then stood up on end and begged as only these coaxing little ruffians can. Being in a hurry, I curtly praised his performance with ‘Good dog !’ clapped his dirty sides, and, turning round, made down the hill ; when presently the same nip, perhaps a little nippier—the same scene, only more intense—the same begging and urgent motioning of his short, shaggy paws. ‘There’s meaning in this,’ said I to myself, and looked at him keenly and differently. He seemed to twig at once, and, with a shrill cry, was off much faster than I could. . He stopped every now and then to see that I followed, and by way of putting off the time and urging me, got up on the aforesaid portion of his body, and, when I came up, was off again. This continued till, after going through sundry streets and by-lanes, we came to a gate, under

which my short-legged friend disappeared. Of course I couldn't follow him. This astonished him greatly. He came out to me, and as much as said, 'Why the —— don't you come in?' I tried to open it, but in vain. My friend vanished and was silent. I was leaving in despair and disgust, when I heard his muffled, ecstatic yelp far off round the end of the wall, and there he was, wild with excitement. I followed and came to a place where, with a somewhat burglarious ingenuity, I got myself squeezed into a deserted coachyard, lying all rude and waste. My peremptory small friend went under a shed, and disappeared in a twinkling through the window of an old coach body, which had long ago parted from its wheels and become sedentary. I remember the arms of the Fife family were on its panel; and, I daresay, this chariot, with its C springs, had figured in 1822 at the King's visit, when all Scotland was somewhat Fifeish. I looked in, and there was a pointer bitch with a litter of five pups; the mother like a ghost, and wild with maternity and hunger; her raging, yelling brood tearing away at her dry dugs. I never saw a more affecting or more miserable scene than that family inside the coach. The poor bewildered mother, I found, had been lost by some sportsman returning south, and must have slunk away there into that deserted place, when her pangs (for she has her pangs as well as a duchess) came, and there, in that forlorn retreat, had

she been with them, rushing out to grab any chance garbage, running back fiercely to them—this going on day after day, night after night. What the relief was when we got her well fed and cared for—and her children filled and silent, all cuddling about her asleep, and she asleep too—awaking up to assure herself that this was all true, and that there they were, all the five, each as plump as a plum,—

‘All too happy in the treasure,
Of her own exceeding pleasure,’—

what this is in kind, and all the greater in amount as many outnumber one, may be the relief, the happiness, the charity experienced and exercised in a homely, well-regulated *Dog Home*. *Nipper*—for he was a waif—I took home that night, and gave him his name. He lived a merry life with me—showed much pluck and zeal in the killing of rats, and incontinently slew a cat which had—unnatural brute, unlike his friend—deserted her kittens, and was howling offensively inside his kennel. He died, aged sixteen, healthy, lean, and happy to the last. As for *Perdita* and her pups, they brought large prices, the late Andrew Buchanan, of Colbridge, an excellent authority and man—the honestest ‘dogman’ I ever knew—having discovered that their blood and her culture were of the best.

I have subscribed to the London ‘Home’ ever since I knew of it, and will be glad to do as much

more for one of our own, as Edinburgh is nearer and dearer than the city of millions of dogs and men. And let us remember that our own dogs are in danger of being infected by all the dog-diseases, from the tragic *rabies* down to the mange and bad manners, by these pariah dogs; for you know among dogs there is in practical operation that absolute equality and fraternity which has only been as yet talked of and shot at by and for us.—I am, &c.

RANDOLPH.



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